

wondered whether a calling female was in or near the trap and had attracted males by her pheromones.

Any monitoring system is imperfect, but for many years my data seemed fairly reliable. In autumn, mid September to mid October was the peak time, but occasional singles continued into December in mild winters, the latest being on 14.xii.2004. In a good year, multiple sightings were usual, the best being nine at one count on the 25 sugared posts on 3.x.2001. Spring sightings might begin in January, my earliest being on 9.i.1998, but mid or late March was more usual, depending on the weather. Attendance at sugar often declined after mid April, perhaps because sallow catkins now provided a more attractive food source. Usually, numbers in spring tallied fairly well with those of the previous autumn, but were slightly lower, as would be expected due to mortality during hibernation.

The pattern broke down in 2003-4. The summer of 2003 was unusually hot for north-east Scotland, resulting in some unprecedented partial second broods of moths that are normally univoltine here (*Ent. Rec.* **116**: 25-32). For the first time, I failed to see a single Sword-grass in autumn, despite the usual effort. It was natural to assume that the high temperatures had adversely affected such an increasingly northern species. Red Sword-grass *X. vetusta*, normally slightly the commoner, was also very scarce, with only four sightings of singles. Worryingly, it seemed that both had suffered a very poor year.

Thus it was a pleasant surprise when both *Xylena* species appeared in above-average numbers the next spring. Between 25.iii and 26.iv.2004, I recorded The Sword-grass on 20 dates, mainly at sugar. Numbers peaked on 29.iii.2004, with four at sugar and five in the light trap next morning, perhaps with some overlap. The same night produced at least ten Red Sword-grass, with nine at once at sugar. These moths must have been present the previous autumn, before hibernation, yet they had not been picked up by my almost nightly recording efforts. Presumably the high temperatures had altered their behaviour rather than affected their numbers. A cautionary tale indeed!— Roy Leverton, Whitewells, Ordiquhill, Cornhill, Banffshire AB45 2HS.

Sword-grass *Xylena exsoleta* (L.) (Lep.: Noctuidae) larva found in north Norfolk in 1948

Having had occasion recently to look through my journal for 1948, I noticed that I had recorded finding on 12 July that year an almost fully grown larva of the Sword-grass *Xylena exsoleta* on cultivated Blackcurrant *Ribes nigrum* at Trunch, near North Walsham, north Norfolk. In view of the present scarcity of this moth in southern England, I feel I should place this find on record. Judging by my notes, I failed to breed out the moth on my return to my then London home; not surprisingly, as it is a notoriously difficult species to rear (Porter, 1997. *The Colour Identification Guide to Caterpillars of the British Isles*. Viking). Peppered Moth *Biston betularia* (L.) larvae were also numerous on these Blackcurrant bushes, the fruit of which I was picking in the course of a school harvest camp.— JOHN F. BURTON, In der Etwiesse 2, D-69181 Leimen-St. Ilgen, Germany.